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Week 17: Spring Mission Feeding

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Cynthia Garrett

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison. Sheila Walsh is here. And Sheila, one of your good friends is here.

Sheila: Yes! I'm excited. Cynthia Garrett has a brand-new book called, *I Choose Victory: Moving from victim to victor*. Please welcome my friend Cynthia.

Cynthia: Thank you!

Sheila: It's so great to have you here.

Cynthia: I'm excited to be here. And I was kind of saying before we started that as a young girl I always watched your parents, James and Betty. And I never -- I would never have thought that God would be using me in any kind of way or that I would be sitting on the set here today. His grace and mercy still blow my mind.

Sheila: Me too! This new book is phenomenal! I love it! But I wonder if we could go back a little bit before we get to this and talk about, because I think when I read a phrase from you like, "I choose victory" I think wow! Because I know your story. Take us back a little bit and tell us kind of how your story started, what your childhood was like.

Cynthia: Well, I had great parents. Sadly their divorce when I was a young girl really impacted me because I was a daddy's girl but I adored my mom. And so I think not enough is probably made of the fact that divorce stinks for kids. It really does. So that

was probably the first attack on my identity, I think as a young girl.

The second came in the form of childhood sexual abuse, which occurred in my home, started at about the time I was six or seven for the next two or three years by my older half-brother.

Sheila: Did you ever tell anyone, Cynthia?

Cynthia: I didn't realize that it happened to my baby sister, my only baby sister also until we were, I was in college and she was still in high school and that's when it came out one day in a very bizarre way because of a comment she made about, "I hate him. I wish he would die." It was so random. And then that's when it hit me, oh goodness something had happened to her as well. So that's really when it came out.

And then from that point forward to me, well, I got raped as a teenager and the quick sort of laundry list is I'm a cancer survivor. I had a horrible first marriage and divorce that was very abusive. I realize when I began to start peeling away the layers and doing a work in Christ that my brokenness all sort of stemmed from this sexual abuse. So the choices I made, the self-esteem that I didn't have, the confidence that I didn't have, the pain that I was in that I would try to mask with overachievement and looking for love in all the wrong places, and outside of myself, mostly.

So I kind of arrived at going public about my abuse really and truly once I began in ministry. And then of course, this year it's kind of gone public all over the world because of my actual sexual abuser stole our life story and made a movie about it called *The Banker*, that Apple ended up buying.

So the last year it's kind of been like a joke, Sheila. Like I turned in my book because I had a book deal long before all of this happened. Turned in my book and within six weeks, and you know this because you prayed me off the wall a number of times, she has! I turn in this book to my publisher called, *I Choose Victory: Moving from victim to*

victor. And within six weeks my husband gets diagnosed with cancer, and I find out our sexual abuser has taken our life story and made a movie about it.

All of the sudden I was literally in a ball in a corner on so many days. Like God, this must be a joke because how can *I Choose Victory* when I've never felt like a bigger victim in my life?

Sheila: So talk about that because I think one of the interesting things is that in your book, you talk about coming to Christ when you're in jail in Italy as a nun brings you a Bible. I mean you are a movie.

Cynthia: Yeah! I like to... My first book is called *Prodigal Daughter: A journey home to identity*. Because I feel like all of these things that happened to myself, but all these things that happen to people in general were about the enemy stealing my identity. So yes, I ended up running off, one of the bad choices I made as a young girl, getting married to a guy that I'd known two months, and woke up ten days later in a prison cell in Italy. I was at such an emotional low. It was really because all this sexual abuse had started kind of bubbling up and I was trying to numb the pain. So anything -- alcohol, drugs, anything that I could do to not be present really in my pain. I woke up in a prison cell married to the wrong guy.

Randy: Can we ask how that happened because that doesn't make sense?

Sheila: Not the typical honeymoon.

Cynthia: No, it is not the typical honeymoon. Convinced my family, who at that point figured wait, something is going on. I'd just graduated from law school in the top quarter of my class, right, from U.S.C. Law School but I had all this pain inside. This guy literally kind of picked me up off of a turnip truck. But I was really reeling inside from a breakup with my fiancé who was my college longtime boyfriend. His family ended up actually going on to disciple me. I discovered James and Betty Robison's show, *LIFE*

Today through them. So when we broke up, it was devastating because I was like one of those girls who wrapped my relationship up with the Lord in my early 20s with this relationship. Big mistake! Big mistake.

So when that ended, I was ripe for the picking. I think the guy that I ran off with and married, ran off with him to Paris, he saw me in a grocery store. All my warning signs went off but I was so desperate and so in pain to kind of feel good about myself.

Sheila: To connect probably.

Cynthia: Yeah, yeah. And I ended up running off to Paris and getting married to him. And literally, within ten days, I mean it was... That's why I ended up writing a book because I find myself teaching from my experiences so much. And so many people would be looking at me like Randy, like what on earth? How did you get in jail?

Sheila: He was a drug dealer.

Cynthia: He was in the car trafficking cocaine on our honeymoon. I found the drugs, took the car, and drove it to the side of a cliff. I'm throwing this stuff out in a ravine. And he came back to our hotel room, we had just gotten into Italy, beat the corn out of me. Drug me back out on the road to find his stuff and we were surrounded by armed police. And that's when the escapades began.

And I ended up a star witness in a trial against him for about two years. Met the Lord in prison because I was locked up with him for the first three months. I was released because miraculously I was pregnant. In those ten days we were together; I'd gotten pregnant on our honeymoon. And my son, who's named Christian Abraham, is my child of faith. And I had to write a book because I can't explain it all in one TV show.

Randy: Suffice to say, when you talk about not being a victim instead of being a victor, you speak from a wealth of experience.

Cynthia: Yeah. That's why when I say it I'm so passionate about it because look, everybody has a story. I always say, our stories can be for his glory if we give it to him. He takes our mess and he makes the message. So through childhood sexual abuse and rape and cancer and an abusive marriage and finding Jesus in a prison cell, being a woman of color in the industry, the list could go on and on. And I often say, for every movement that exists today, for whether it is Times Up, Me Too, Black Lives Matter, you name it, every victim's group out there I could be the poster child of. And I look at these things and I realize, it's great that we've given people a voice but what we have to give them is solutions. And victory for me has been about choosing Jesus.

Sheila: I love when you write, "Victory doesn't live in your emotions." You make it very clear that this is a choice. I'm thinking of somebody watching in right now who perhaps had, not obviously quite your story, but maybe was abused as a child, and they want that person to be sorry or they want that person to repent. How do you choose victory when the person doesn't care?

Cynthia: You know something? I go back to what I know. And for me, this is why it's a choice. My emotions, a lot, even this year, I was telling you, they have been all over the place, out of control, hurt, broken, sad. Why me? God, you don't see me. How could this be fair? I'm a good person! Why did this happen to me? As if wrong is a respecter of persons.

But in those moments where my emotions are really, really raw, I always go back to what I know. And what I know means you make a choice. And sometimes for me, I was telling you earlier, that choice is really simple. I call it my two words, Alexa, play "Waymaker."

[Laughter]

I know! I go back to worship. And then that rises. We were so made to worship obviously

because when you go there all the sudden you feel your spirit begin to lift with the Lord, then you're reading the word, and now you start to speak truth over your circumstances and then you're standing and eventually, you're moving forward and you're choosing victory again. And sometimes it is a daily choice, I get it! But there are too many victims in this country.

Randy: It is not how many times you get knocked down, it's how many times you get back up. At what point did you realize in your path to victory, because I think a lot of times, we think of victory almost in sporting terms. My team won so therefore they're the winners -- period. But it's almost like in life, you have to choose that victory day after day. You have to get up day after day, you have to choose to fight sometimes what feels like the same battles day after day. How much of victory is a process?

Cynthia: That's a really good question and I do think it is a process, but I also think that the more you do it, the shorter the process. It is like I know if I wallow in my choice to be a victim or in the victimization that is happening to me for too long it's really hard to get up and I'm making bad choices from that place. I'm making good choices when I go, okay, you know what? This hurts. This hurts but take it quickly to the throne room. Get what you need to get and then make the choice because the choice is yours.

Sheila: From this book, *I Choose Victory*: Moving from victim to victor, what do you think are some of the key lessons that you want people to learn? You talk about three danger zones in one chapter which I found really interesting.

Cynthia: I kind of for me, the way that I processed it and how God has given it to me is that victory lives in these three war zones and then the fourth is actually victory itself. So I break the book down into the personal war zone. We all have a personal war zone; it is our personal set of circumstances. It is the personal brokenness that we have, usually from our childhood. We've got to deal with it. You have to confront your own stuff.

That then impacts the spiritual war zone because your walk spiritually is important and

it's usually because of whatever is broken over here, if you don't fix it you're making poor spiritual choices over here and the enemy has got control of your life and your emotions. We're supposed to be in control of our emotions, not the enemy and not our emotions. We're supposed to use godly reason and judgment.

So then I talk a bit about the political war zone, and I believe we have a very active and alive political war zone in our nation today simply because individuals refuse to deal with their personal war zone and their spiritual war zone. You can't help but have a nation divided and torn and fighting with each other over absurdity when the reality is, we don't really have a political party problem, we have a Jesus problem in our country. Choosing victory for me has been all about choosing Jesus Christ, choosing my faith.

Randy: I think I hear you suggesting that any societal problem we might have is a reflection of a personal spiritual problem that's gone undealt with.

Cynthia: Absolutely!

Sheila: I want to take you back to that moment, though, Cynthia because your first book, I read your first book, I love it. It's an incredible story. God has brought you through so much. But then in this last year where you and I together were involved with She Loves Out Loud, calling a million women together to pray, you get hit with your husband's cancer and you get hit with some other issues. At this stage and maturity in your life with Christ, when you feel yourself getting smacked again wave after wave, how do you keep your head above water -- apart from Alexa play Waymaker?

Cynthia: Exactly! Well, apart from go back to what I know which is really basic. You read the word. You reaffirm your identity; who are you? For people who don't know Christ, to me, this is the ultimate invitation for them to go okay, I need to know the Lord because I think people can be in victory without faith, they think but I've known so many people who are wealthy, so many people who are famous, so many that and they don't have the wealthiness inside that we have.

I've looked at some of the guests you've had on your shows and you just go, how does this person live with that? You're staring at them like they really are the peace of God that surpasses understanding. Well, that's the thing that we have because of our choice. So I really try to go back to the things that I remember about my own identity. I'm his daughter, he loves me. He has good plans for me. He is not a man that he would lie. That's a big one for me because we all know that humans will lie and when you feel like a victim you feel like everybody is lying to you. And I always try to remember because I think all of what happened to me this year in writing this book, what God said to me is I wanted you to be sensitive because when you tell someone not to be a victim, you need to understand how victimized they really feel, how broken they really feel. And it's really a trip because what I realized is that orphans in Africa don't want to be victims. The girl that was sexually abused doesn't want to be a victim. People don't want to be a victim. It is just that they don't know how to choose victory.

Randy: That's a great point! I think a right rebuke to a lot of people in the church because it is easy to go, quit acting like a victim. Don't play the victim. What is the best approach to get into that person's world in order to make them a victor?

Cynthia: Right! Because we're the light that shines in the darkness. We have to teach them how to choose victory. Well, I think part of what that means is that you're super transparent about your journey and what you're going through all the time. I think a part of our responsibility as leaders in the church is to be transparent and to let people know that I'll never feel like I've arrived. The moment I do I'll probably be dead so at that moment it will probably be I've arrived! Good-bye! Because I feel like we're works in progress until he takes us home. So I think when we're a bit transparent we learn grace for each other, and we learn grace for other people.

Because I started out and always worked in secular Hollywood before moving into kingdom media, I look at a lot of people. There's so much mess! It's like I look at some circumstances and I'm like, okay. Wow! That's a mess! But part of me understands also

that I need to be truthful about who I am, but I also need to understand this person is a victim of things they don't even know they're a victim of. So how do I love that person when they're standing in a choice thinking it is authentic and you're going oh! That's not what God created you for! Or with!

And sometimes I think because you know the truth, and I get myself on this all the time, my patience is short sometimes. I'm like you can't have... You can't be short of patience. You can't be self-righteous. You have to remember that but for the grace of God you've been able to choose victory.

Sheila: Yeah. I think one of the gifts in the book of Cynthia's is it's walking you through the whole process. Perhaps you feel like you've been stuck in that place for a long, long time. But Cynthia is going share the journey out of that.

And one of the things that she said, that struck home with me, Randy, I know it would with you too, is that children in Africa don't choose to be victims. But one of the things we have chosen at *LIFE Today* through initially the hearts of James and Betty is to come beside those children and beside those mothers and let them know there is hope, there is help, and there is healing. Would you go with us to Africa? Let me show you what I mean.

On the mission field:

Announcer: *LIFE Outreach International* teams, along with our mission partners travel the world documenting the needs of families who lack the very basics of life. Without a doubt, Africa's children always tear at the heart of our teams when they see them struggling in extreme circumstances.

Sheila: I cannot imagine what it would be like to be a mother like this and want desperately to help your child. This is the hospital that some of these moms had to walk 10-15 kilometers with a seriously malnourished baby just to try and get some help. And if

they can get here in time, then there is some hope. But time is everything here as you can see.

>> I remember when my brother died. We were hungry and he was so thin. My mom took him to a clinic that was very far away, and he died on the way there.

Announcer: It is now up to us to do something to help relieve the plight of these little ones. A bowl of food a day provided through our mission feeding program can make the difference between life and death for young children.

Sheila: But my prayer is that we can save hundreds of other children before they get to this stage. No child should ever get to this stage. No mom should ever have to watch this. So if we do something now, we can stop this from happening.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: I will never forget my first visit to a malnutrition clinic in Angola. I've seen things like you have on television and felt some of the pain but when you walk in, in the heat, and hear these tiny little ones crying and you see their mothers crying and you see the staff on the ground doing everything they can to bring relief, it's a sight that I will... I've actually asked God, never let me forget what that looked like! Because the thing is we're so used to watching TV and it's like out there and we're here. This is happening right now, right at this moment in these clinics in Africa. These little ones are literally starving to death.

The fact that James and Betty found people on the ground, boots on the ground in Jesus' name making a difference has been life-changing. We have made a commitment here at *LIFE Outreach* to continue to feed 350,000 children. I remember Betty's prayer, I'll never

forget her prayer: Never let the line of children waiting with that little red bowl for a meal, never let the line be longer than the food we have to give them. That's her prayer -- and that's my prayer! And we can only do that if you will keep helping us. That's what we want to do this year, feed 350,000 children. And Randy, if we all do something, we can do this!

Randy: Absolutely! When you see a situation like that, I understand it's difficult. How many of those children would you help if you could? Three? Five? Ten? A hundred? It's actually very easy. You can feed three children for three months for \$30; five children for \$50; ten children for \$100. Some of you can feed 100 children, maybe 200 or 300 children for the next three months by making a gift today. That's what we're asking you to do. Here's why. Because as heartbreaking as those photos are, those video images are, as heartbreaking as those are to watch, it's heartwarming when you see what mission feeding does.

And I know, Sheila, you've been there. We've both been there. You go to a village where they're starving and there is desperate need and it just crushes you. And then you go to a village where we have mission feeding and you see the difference that it makes. It is night and day! You go from tears and suffering to songs and learning because we feed oftentimes in schools, most of the time in schools because we want to give them not just food for today but a future for tomorrow.

So mission feeding is so much more than just the bowl of food. It is a future, it is hope, it's the love of Christ, it's the gospel, and it's the good news in action. But we have to have your help. So please do what you can. Go online, go to the phones, however you prefer to give, and make the best gift that you can today and know that when you join with us in mission feeding, you are saving lives.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Mission feeding began with a promise to be there in times of crisis for thousands of hurting and hungry children in their time of need. Now more than ever we need your help to save lives by feeding and caring for children across the continent of Africa.

With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish our supplies to reach the 350,000 children who are counting on us.

Your gift of love can be the miracle answer to a desperate mother's prayer. Call now with your life saving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 that will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. With your gift we'll send you the *Global Impact of Life Journal*. This softcover journal includes pictures from the mission field and inspiring scriptures as a reminder of your impact in giving to bless lives around the world.

With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the *Global Impact Bible*. This English Standard Version presents a fascinating guide to the impact of the bestselling book of all time filled with quotes from well-known figures, photographs and reproductions of fine art. It highlights the many surprising ways scripture has shaped civilization.

Finally with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children be sure to request our commemorative bronze sculpture, "A Mother's Strength."

Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video**On the mission field:**

Isak: You can see here how our staff are actually busy measuring the arm circumference of these children. So what they do is they measure their arm circumference, they measure their height, they measure their weight and then they gauge that against the age of the

child. Because for many of these children they're suffering from severe malnutrition. And the shocking thing is we find children in this area that literally are five, six, seven, eight years old and yet, they are the weight and the size of a child half their age.

This is a crisis and crisis require a massive action and that's what I'm asking you today, to give a massive action, an action of life -- lifesaving by providing food to these children to their mothers, to this village that so desperately needs it.

End of video

In the studio:

Randy: Please do make the best gift you can. It really is important that we all come together. I would like to help more than 350,000 children this year, Sheila. I know it's on your heart too.

Sheila: I know but we've made a commitment to do that. Please help us! For any gift at all, we would love to send you Cynthia's book, *I Choose Victory*. I think it will really encourage you. And perhaps, you know of some friends that really need that too.

But please go to the phone. Make the best gift possible. Honestly, the difference, literally, from that first bowl of food, it turns them from death to life.

Randy: From victim to victor.

Sheila: Absolutely! Would you help us thank Cynthia?

Cynthia: Amen! Amen! Thank you, guys!

Randy: And thank all of you for watching. Join us every day here on *LIFE Today*!

Sheila: See you next time!